CHAPTER OUTLINE

The “Model-Minority” Image Explored
Political Activity and Pan-Asian Identity
Listen to Our Voices
Asian America Still Discovering Elusive Identity
Diversity among Asian Americans
Asian Indians
Research Focus
Arranged Marriages in America
Filipino Americans
Southeast Asian Americans
Korean Americans
Hawai‘i and Its People

WHAT WILL YOU LEARN?

> What Accounts for the “Model-Minority” Image?
> What Characterizes Political Activity and Pan-Asian Identity?
> Is Diversity among Asian Americans Recognized?
> Who Are the Asian Indians?
> Who Are the Filipino Americans?
> Who Are the Southeast Asian Americans?
> Who Are the Korean Americans?
> How Do Hawai‘i and Its People Embody Cultural Diversity?
Asian Americans: 
Growth and Diversity

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are a diverse group that is one of the fastest-growing segments of the U.S. population. Asian Americans often are viewed as a model minority that has successfully overcome discrimination. This inaccurate image disguises lingering maltreatment and anti-Asian American violence. Furthermore, it denies Asian Americans the assistance afforded other racial minorities. Immigration is the primary source of growth among Asian Indians, Filipinos, Southeast Asians, and Koreans. All Asian groups, along with Blacks and Whites (or Haoles, as they are known there), coexist in Hawai’i.
Vietnamese American Tuan Nguyen, age 54, tends the 80 areas in rural South Carolina overseeing 160,000 chickens. His wife lives 50 miles away where she operates a nail salon. They get together about once a week where the main topic of conversation is how they are putting their four daughters through college. Making a poultry farm go is hard work and Nguyen has mentored other Vietnamese Americans who have struggled to stick with it.

Friday night lights in Texas high school football but in this case many of players were born in the Pacific island of Tonga. As 6-foot-2, 297-pound Trinity High offensive tackle Uatakini Cocker takes the line, he screams “Mate ma’a Tonga,” meaning, “I will die for Tonga.” He is one of 16 Tongan Americans playing for the school. Trinity is located in Euless, which adjoins the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport where Tongans in the early 1970s first started working. The success among some of these first immigrants initiated a pattern of chain immigration where Tongan immigrants sponsor later immigrants. Euless boasts about 4,000 people either born in Tonga or their descendants (Copeland 2011; Euless Historical Preservation Committee 2011; Longman 2008).

A poultry farmer and a high school football player remind us that the legacy of immigration to the United States is not merely quaint turn-of-the-century black-and-white photos taken at Ellis Island. It is not merely a thickly accented elderly person reminiscing about the “old country.” Immigration, race, and ethnicity are being lived out among people of all ages, and for no collective group is this truer than for Asian Americans who are living throughout the United States (Figure 12.1).

Asian Americans include groups such as Chinese Americans and Filipinos, whose nationality groups also include different linguistic groups and identifiable ethnic groups (Figure 12.2). Asian Americans also include ethnic groups, such as the Hmong, that do not correspond to any one nation. Finally, the U.S. population also includes Pacific Islanders, including Hawaiians, Samoans, Tongans, and many smaller groups. Collectively, Asian Pacific Islanders in 2010 numbered 14.6 million—a 43.3 percent increase over 2000, compared with an overall population increase of only 9.7 percent. This is a slightly larger increase than Latinos experienced during the first decade of the twenty-first century (Herm et al. 2011).

**FIGURE 12.1**
Where Most Asian Pacific Islanders Live

Despite these large numbers—which are equivalent to the total African American population after World War II—Asian Americans feel ignored. They see “race and ethnicity” in America framed as a Black–White issue or, more recently, as a “triracial” issue that includes Hispanics. But where are the Asian Americans in these pictures of the United States? For example, tens of thousands of Asian Americans, especially Vietnamese Americans, were displaced by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, but they received little media notice. Immigration issues understandably focus on Latin America, but what about challenges facing Asians who seek legal entry to the United States or the Asian Americans who are already here?

To comprehend better the collective picture of Asian Americans, we first consider the powerful image that many people have of Asian Americans constituting some kind of perfect, model minority. We then turn our attention to the role they play politically in the United States and the degree to which a pan-Asian identity is emerging.

We then consider four of the larger groups—Filipinos, Asian Indians, Southeast Asians, and Koreans—in greater depth. The chapter concludes by examining the coexistence of a uniquely mixed group of peoples—Hawaiians—among whom Asian Americans form the numerical majority. Chapter 13 concentrates on the Chinese and the Japanese, the two Asian groups with the longest historical tradition in the United States.

The “Model-Minority” Image Explored

“Asian Americans are a success! They achieve! They succeed! There are no protests, no demands. They just do it!” This is the general image that people in the United States so often hold of Asian Americans as a group. They constitute a model or ideal minority because, although they have experienced prejudice and discrimination, they seem to have succeeded economically, socially, and educationally without resorting to political or violent confrontations with Whites. Some observers point to the existence of a model minority as a reaffirmation that anyone can get ahead in the United States. Proponents of the model-minority view declare that because Asian Americans have achieved success, they have ceased to be subordinate and are no longer disadvantaged. This labeling is only a variation of blaming the victim; with Asian Americans, it is “praising the victim.” An examination of aspects of their socioeconomic status will allow a more thorough exploration of this view.

Education and the Economy

Asian Americans, as a group, have impressive school enrollment rates in comparison to the total population. In 2010, half of Asian Americans 25 years old or older held bachelor’s degrees, compared with 28 percent of the White population (Bureau of the Census 2011a). These rates vary among Asian American groups. Asian Indians, Filipino Americans, Korean Americans, Chinese Americans, and Japanese Americans have higher levels of educational achievement than others. Yet other groups such as Vietnamese Americans and Pacific Islanders, including Native Hawaiians, fare much worse than White Americans (see Table 12.1).

This encouraging picture does have some qualifications, however, that call into question the optimistic model-minority view. According to a study of California’s state university system, although Asian Americans often are viewed as successful overachievers, they have unrecognized and overlooked needs and experience discomfort and harassment on campus. As a group, they also lack Asian faculty and staff members to whom they can turn for support. They confront many identity issues and have to do a “cultural balancing

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FIGURE 12.2
Asian Pacific Islanders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asian American Group</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Americans</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino Americans</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Indians</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese Americans</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiians</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese Americans</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Pacific Islanders</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Asian Americans</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean Americans</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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act” along with all the usual pressures faced by college students. The report noted that an “alarming number” of Asian American students appear to be experiencing intense stress and alienation, problems that have often been “exacerbated by racial harassment” (Ohnuma 1991; Teranishi 2010).

Even the positive stereotype of Asian American students as “academic stars” or “whiz kids” can be burdensome to the people so labeled. Asian Americans who do only modestly well in school may face criticism from their parents or teachers for their failure to conform to the “whiz kid” image. Some Asian American youths disengage from school when faced with these expectations or receive little support for their interest in vocational pursuits or athletics (Kibria 2002; Maddux et al. 2008).

Another misleading sign of the apparent success of Asian Americans is their high incomes as a group. Like other elements of the image, however, this deserves closer inspection. Asian American family income approaches parity with that of Whites because of their greater achievement than Whites in formal schooling. If we look at specific educational levels, however, Whites earn more than their Asian counterparts of the same age. Asian Americans’ average earnings increased by at least $2,300 for each additional year of schooling whereas Whites gained almost $3,000. As we see in Table 12.1, Asian Americans as a group have significantly more formal schooling but actually have lower household family income. We should note that to some degree, some Asian Americans’ education is from overseas and, therefore, may be devalued by U.S. employers. Yet in the end, educational attainment does pay off as much if one is of Asian descent as it does for White non-Hispanics (Kim and Sakamoto 2010; Zeng and Xie 2004).

There are striking contrasts among Asian Americans. Nevertheless, for every Asian American household in 2009 with an annual income of $150,000 or more, another earns less than $23,000 a year. Almost every Asian American group has a higher poverty rate than non-Hispanic Whites (the lone exception is Filipinos who tend to live in the relatively high income states of Hawaii and California (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, and Smith 2010:37; Omi 2008; Sakamoto et al. 2009).

At first, one might be puzzled to see criticism of a positive generalization such as “model minority.” Why should the stereotype of adjusting without problems be a disservice to Asian Americans? The answer is that this incorrect view helps to exclude Asian Americans from social programs and conceals unemployment and other social ills. When representatives of Asian groups do seek assistance for those in need, people who have accepted the model-minority stereotype resent them. This is especially troubling given that problems of substance abuse and juvenile delinquency need to be addressed within the Asian American community.

If a minority group becomes viewed as successful, its members will no longer be included in any program designed to alleviate the problems they encounter as minorities. The positive stereotype reaffirms the United States system of mobility. New immigrants as well as established subordinate groups ought to achieve more merely by working within the system. At the same time, viewed from the conflict perspective outlined in Chapter 1, this becomes
yet another instance of blaming the victim: if Asian Americans have succeeded, then Blacks and Latinos must be responsible for their own low status rather than recognizing society’s responsibility (Bascara 2008; Choi and Lahey 2006; Chou and Feagin 2008; Ryan 1976).

The Door Half Open

Despite the widespread belief that they constitute a model minority, Asian Americans are victims of both prejudice and violence. Reports released annually by the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium (2002) have chronicled incidents of suspected and proven anti-Asian American incidents. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, anti-Asian violence increased dramatically for several months in the United States. The first fatality was an Asian Indian American who was shot and killed by a gunman in Mesa, Arizona, shouting, “I stand for America all the way.”

This anti-Asian American feeling is built on a long cultural tradition. The term yellow peril dates back to the view of Asian immigration, particularly from China, as unwelcome. Yellow peril came to refer to the generalized prejudice toward Asian people and their customs. The immigrants were characterized as heathen, morally inferior, drug addicted, savage, or lustful. Although the term was first used around the turn of the twentieth century, this anti-Asian sentiment is very much alive today. Many contemporary Asian Americans find this intolerance very unsettling given their conscientious efforts to extend their education, seek employment, and conform to the norms of society. Hate crimes against Asian Americans persist and have even risen in recent years (Hurh 1994; Lee, Vue, Seklecki, and Ma 2007).

What explains the increase in violence against Asian Americans? Prejudice against Asian Americans is fueled by how they are represented in the media. The Asian American Journalists Association (2000, 2009) annually conducts a “media watch” to identify how mainstream news media use ethnic slurs and stereotypes, demonstrate insensitivity, and otherwise exhibit bias in reporting. We can identify several ways in which this occurs—some subtle, some overt.

- **Inappropriate use of clichés**: News reports use the term Asian invasion even when referring to a small number of Asian Americans. For example, a 1994 Sports Illustrated article about Asians trying out for major league baseball teams was billed “Orient Express” and “Asian Invasion,” yet the story noted only two Asians as examples.
- **Mistaken identity**: Not only are Asians identified by the wrong nationality but also American citizens of Asian descent are presented as if they were foreigners.

blaming the victim
portraying the problems of racial and ethnic minorities as their fault rather than recognizing society’s responsibilities

yellow peril
a term denoting a generalized prejudice toward Asian people and their customs
- **Overgeneralization:** Inappropriate assumptions are made and too widely applied. For example, a newspaper article discussing the growth of Chinatown was headlined “There Goes the Neighborhood,” implying that any increase in the number of Chinese Americans was undesirable.

- **Ethnic slurs:** Although the print media generally take great pains to avoid racially derogatory terms, radio talk shows offer frequent examples of racism. Comedians often mock Asian names and, in a derisive manner, mimic patterns of Asian American speech.

- **Inflammatory reporting:** Unbalanced coverage of such events as World War II or Asian investment in the United States can needlessly contribute to ill feelings. The identification of the 2007 Virginia Tech shooter as a Korean American led to extended treatment of adjustment problems for some immigrant households.

- **Asian bashing:** News accounts may unfairly blame Asian nations for economic problems in the United States. For example, the low production costs of China-based industries are seen as responsible for job loss in the United States even though they make many goods much more affordable to consumers in North America.

- **Media invisibility:** News reports may ignore Asian Americans and rarely seek their views on issues related to Asia, much less general global issues.

- **Model minority:** This positive portrayal can also have a negative effect.

In its own way, each bias contributes to the unbalanced view we have developed of the large, diverse Asian American population.

The resentment against Asian Americans is not limited to overt expressions of violence. Like other subordinate groups, Asian Americans are subject to institutional discrimination. For example, some Asian American groups have large families and find themselves subject to zoning laws stipulating the number of people per room, which make it difficult for family members to live together. Kinfolk are unable to take in family members legally. Whereas we may regard these family members as distant relatives, many Asian cultures view cousins, uncles, and aunts as relatives to whom they have a great deal of familial responsibility.

The marginal status of Asian Pacific Islanders leaves them vulnerable to both selective and collective oppression. In 1999, news stories implicated Wen Ho Lee, a nuclear physicist at Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico, as a spy for China. Subsequent investigation, during which Lee was imprisoned under very harsh conditions, concluded that the naturalized citizen scientist had indeed downloaded secret files to an unsecured computer, but there was no evidence that the information ever went further.

In the aftermath of the Wen Ho Lee incident, a new form of racial profiling emerged. We introduced **racial profiling** in Chapter 2 as any police-initiated action that relies on race, ethnicity, or national origin rather than a person’s behavior. Despite Lee’s being found not guilty, Asian Americans were viewed as security risks. A survey found that 32 percent of the people in the United States felt that Chinese Americans are more loyal to China than to the United States. In fact, the same survey showed that 46 percent were concerned about Chinese Americans passing secrets to China. Subsequent studies found that Asian Americans were avoiding top-secret science labs for employment because they became subject to racial profiling at higher security levels (Committee of 100 2001; Department of Energy 2000; Lee with Zia 2006; Wu 2002).

For young Asian Americans, life in the United States often is a struggle for identity when their heritage is so devalued by those in positions of influence. Sometimes identity means finding a role in White America; other times, it involves finding a place among Asian Americans collectively and then locating oneself within one’s own racial or ethnic community.
Political Activity and Pan-Asian Identity

Against this backdrop of prejudice, discrimination, and a search for identity, it would not be surprising to see Asian Americans seeking to recognize themselves. Historically, Asian Americans have followed the pattern of other immigrant groups: they bring organizations from the homeland and later develop groups to respond to the special needs identified in the United States.

Rather than being docile, as Asian Americans are often labeled, they have organized in labor unions, played a significant role in campus protests, and been active in immigration rights issues. Recently, given a boost by anti-alien feelings after 9/11, Asian Americans staged demonstrations in several cities, seeking to persuade people to become citizens and register to vote (Chan 1991; Chang 2007).

For newly arrived Asians, grassroots organizations and political parties are a new concept. With the exception of Asian Indians, the immigrants come from nations where political participation was unheard of or looked upon with skepticism and sometimes fear. Using the sizable Chinese American community as an example, we can see why Asian Americans have been slow to achieve political mobilization. At least six factors have been identified that explain why Chinese Americans—and, to a large extent, Asian Americans in general—have not been more active in politics:

1. To become a candidate means to take risks, invite criticism, be assertive, and be willing to extol one’s virtues. These traits are alien to Chinese culture.
2. Older people remember when discrimination was blatant, and they tell others to be quiet and not attract attention.
3. Many recent immigrants have no experience with democracy and arrive with a general distrust of government.
4. Like many new immigrant groups, Chinese Americans have concentrated on getting ahead economically and educating their children rather than thinking in terms of the larger community.
5. The brightest students tend to pursue careers in business and science rather than law or public administration and, therefore, are not prepared to enter politics.
6. Chinatowns notwithstanding, Chinese and other Asian American groups are dispersed and cannot control the election of even local candidates.

On the other hand, both Democrats and Republicans are increasingly regarding Asian Americans as a future political force in the United States. During the last five national elections, the Republicans and Democrats seemed to evenly share the electorate. Yet in 2008, 66 percent of Asian American voters backed Democrat Obama—a partisan margin not seen before. Whether this reflects a permanent shift to the Democrats or speaks to the popularity of Barack Obama will be closely watched in coming elections (Connelly 2008).

Despite the diversity among groups of Asian Americans and Asian Pacific Islanders, they have spent generations being treated as a monolithic group. Out of similar experiences have come panethnic identities in which people share a self-image, as do African Americans or Whites of European descent. As we noted in Chapter 1, panethnicity is the development of solidarity between ethnic subgroups. Are Asian Americans finding a panethnic identity? In Listen to Our Voices, New York-based writer Jean Han, born in the United States and the daughter of immigrants from Korea, tackles this question head on.

It is true that in the United States, extremely different Asian nationalities have been lumped together in past discrimination and current stereotypes. Asian Americans now see the need to unify their diverse subgroups. After centuries of animosity between ethnic
groups in Asia, any feelings of community among Asian Americans must develop anew here; they bring none with them. Some observers contend that a move toward pan-Asian identity represents a step in assimilation by downplaying cultural differences.

Yet pan-Asian identity often serves to solidify and strengthen organizing at the grassroots level when trying to bring about change in neighborhoods and communities where they are outnumbered and underrepresented in the corridors of political power. From

Listen to Our Voices

Asian America Still Discovering Elusive Identity

It’s not easy to figure out the collective identity of a community.

An annual lift in spirits comes around the month of May designated as APA Heritage Month, which has become an opportunity to observe the history of Asians in America through a calendar full of cultural events and celebrations.

But the month also serves as a springboard for many Asian Americans to grapple with identity on a personal and communal level outside of these organized events.

Having a political voice, for example, still remains a challenge for Asians, says Ann Surapruik, who serves on the Washington D.C. chapter board of the national Asian Pacific American Women’s Forum. According to Surapruik, when groups of high-level people gather, very often Asian Americans are not represented. “Our biggest issue is visibility,” she says.

Visibility also extends to the different deeds of ethnic groups within the “Asian Pacific Islander” description. For example, a February Seattle Times article details the battle against the misperception by potential scholarship funders that because Asian Pacific Islander students are doing well as a group, they do not need extra help—yet there are wide disparities in standardized test performance between Japanese American and Samoan American students.

And this may prove one of the ways APA Heritage Month can be most useful: to spotlight how the APA community is cohesive, but not homogeneous. Events that come and go, like APA Heritage Month, can seem “generic,” says Ben de Guzman, national campaign coordinator for the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance. “But I think the usefulness of it is our ability to say in an official way that this is [Asian America] in all of its diversity.”

APA Heritage month can also create a diversity of public forums for important Asian American issues, says Deepa Iyer, executive director of South Asian Americans Leading Together, a nonprofit community-building organization in Maryland. “Different forums exist, whether it’s a corporate affinity group or a local high school, or even [looking at] Asian American history,” Iyer says. “There are many different ways in which we can take a closer look at our community.”

The month can also be a time for more personal reflection. Attorney Courtney Chappell, a Korean American adoptee, says her questions of Asian identity did not surface fully until college. “I’m still sort of figuring out what it means,” she adds.

Chappell recalls the difficulty of finding an Asian American role model or someone who could empathize with her identity struggles. “When I face racism and discrimination, it was hard to share that with my parents, who would try but couldn’t relate,” she explains.

For Chappell, celebrating a heritage that is mostly foreign to her is empowering: “I celebrate by being part of a movement that is larger than me.”

What it means to be Asian American on a personal level, then, may often be placed within a larger context of community. At the same time, understanding what the larger community needs means identifying its smaller parts. “Our community is so diverse,” de Guzman concludes, “it exceeds our ability to describe it.”

Source: Han 2008.
this perspective, pan-Asian unity is a necessity and urgency for all Asian groups (Cheng and Yang 2000; Mitra 2008; Võ 2004).

**Diversity among Asian Americans**

The political activity of Asian Pacific Islanders occurs within a complex segment of the population: Asian Americans who reflect the diversity of their native lands. Asia is a vast region, holding more than half the world’s population. The successive waves of immigrants to the United States from that continent have comprised a large number of nationalities and cultures. In addition to the seven groups listed in Figure 12.2, the U.S. Bureau of the Census enumerates 47 groups, as shown in Table 12.2. Given this variety among Asian Pacific Islanders, we can apply to Asian Americans several generalizations made earlier about Native Americans. Both groups are a collection of diverse peoples with distinct linguistic, social, and geographic backgrounds.

Asian Americans, like Native Americans, are not evenly distributed across the United States. To lump these people together ignores the sharp differences between them. Any examination of Asian Americans quickly reveals their diversity, which will be apparent as we focus on individual Asian American groups, beginning with Asian Indians.

### TABLE 12.2
**Asian Pacific Islander Groups in the United States**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asian Pacific Islander</th>
<th>Pacific Islander</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian Indian</td>
<td>Carolinian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td>Chuukese</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bhutanese</td>
<td>Fijian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burmese</td>
<td>Guamanian or Chamorro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodian</td>
<td>I-Kiribati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Kosraean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>Marianna Islander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hmong</td>
<td>Marshallese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indo Chinese</td>
<td>Melanesian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesian</td>
<td>Micronesian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iwo Jiman</td>
<td>Native Hawaiian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>Ni-Vanuatu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>Palauan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laotian</td>
<td>Papua New Guinean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysian</td>
<td>Pohnpeian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maldivian</td>
<td>Polynesian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nepalese</td>
<td>Saipanese</td>
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<tr>
<td>Okinawan</td>
<td>Samoan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>Solomon Islander</td>
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<tr>
<td>Singaporean</td>
<td>Tahitian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sri Lankan</td>
<td>Tokelauan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taiwanese</td>
<td>Tongan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>Yapese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Groups as enumerated separately in the 2000 census.

*Source:* Barnes and Bennett 2002; Grieco 2001.
Asian Indians

The second-largest Asian American group (after Chinese Americans) is composed of immigrants from India and their descendants and numbers over 2.6 million. Sometimes immigrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka are also included in this group.

Immigration

Like several other Asian immigrant groups, Asian Indians (or East Indians) are recent immigrants. Only 17,000 total came from 1820 to 1965, with the majority of those arriving before 1917. These pioneers were subjected to some of the same anti-Asian measures that restricted Chinese immigration. For example, the Supreme Court (1923) ruled that an Asian Indian could not become a naturalized citizen because they were not White and therefore were excluded under the 1917 law that applied to all natives of Asia. This prohibition continued until 1946.

Immigration law, although dropping nationality preferences, gave priority to the skilled, so the Asian Indians arriving in the 1960s through the 1980s tended to be urban, educated, and English-speaking. More than twice the proportion of Asian Indians aged 25 and older had a college degree, compared with the general population. These families experienced a smooth transition from life in India to life in the United States. They usually settled here in urban areas or located near universities or medical centers. Initially, they flocked to the Northeast, but by 1990, California had edged out New York as the state with the largest concentration of Asian Indians. The growth of Silicon Valley’s information technology industry furthered the increase of Asian Indian professionals in Northern California (Bureau of the Census 2007a).

More recent immigrants, sponsored by earlier immigrant relatives, are displaying less facility with English, and the training they have tends to be less easily adapted to the U.S. workplace. They are more likely to work in service industries, usually with members of their extended families. They are often in positions that many Americans reject because of the long hours, the seven-day workweek, and vulnerability to crime. Consequently, Asian Indians are as likely to be cab drivers or managers of motels or convenience stores as they are to be physicians or college teachers. Asian Indians see the service industries as transitional jobs to acclimatize them to the United States and to give them the money they need to become more economically self-reliant (Kalita 2003; Levitt 2004; Varadarajan 1999).

The Current Picture

It is difficult to generalize about Asian Indians because, like all other Asian Americans, they reflect a diverse population. With more than 1.2 billion people in 2011, India will be the most populous nation in the world by 2025. Diversity governs every area. The Indian government recognizes 18 official languages, each with its own cultural heritage. Some can be written in more than one type of script. Hindus are the majority in India and also among the immigrants to the United States, but significant religious minorities include Sikhs, Muslims, Jains, and Zoroastrians.

Religion among Asian Indians presents an interesting picture. Among initial immigrants, religious orthodoxy often is stronger than it is in India. Immigrants try to practice the Hindu and Muslim faiths true to their practices in India rather than joining the Caribbean versions of these major faiths already established in the United States by other immigrant groups. Although other Indian traditions are maintained, older immigrants see challenges not only from U.S. culture but also from pop culture from India, which is imported through motion pictures and magazines. It is a very dynamic situation as the Asian Indian population moves into the twenty-first century (Kurien 2004, 2007; Rangaswamy 2005).

Maintaining traditions within the family household is a major challenge for Asian Indian immigrants to the United States. These ties remain strong, and many Asian Indians see themselves as more connected to their relatives 10,000 miles away than Americans are to their kinfolk less than a hundred miles away. Parents are concerned about the erosion of traditional family authority among the desi. Desi (pronounced “DAY-see”) is a colloquial name for people who trace their ancestry to South Asia, especially India.
Asian Indian children, dressed like their peers, go to fast-food restaurants and eat hamburgers while out on their own, yet both Hindus and many Asian Indian Muslims are vegetarian by practice. Sons do not feel the responsibility to the family that tradition dictates. Daughters, whose occupation and marriage could, in India, be closely controlled by the family, assert their right to choose work and, in an even more dramatic break from tradition, select their husbands.

In Research Focus, we consider one cultural practice faced by Asian Indian and some other immigrant groups not a part of American mainstream culture: arranged marriages.

### Research Focus

#### Arranged Marriages in America

The question becomes not does he or she love me but who do my parents want me to marry. An *arranged marriage* is when others choose the marital partners not based on any preexisting mutual attraction. Indeed, typically in arranged marriages the couple does not even know one another.

The idea of arranged marriages seems strange to most youth growing up in the United States whose culture romanticizes finding Mr. or Ms. Right. In an arranged marriage, the boy and girl start off on neutral ground, with no expectations of each other. Then understanding develops between them as the relationship matures. The couple selected is assumed to be compatible because they are chosen from very similar social, economic, and cultural backgrounds.

In an arranged marriage, the couple works to achieve the mutual happiness they expect to find. In contrast, in a romantic or sentimental marriage, couples start off from a high ground of dreams and illusions from which there is little likelihood for things to get better and there are great chances of failure, as some of the dreams do not materialize after marriage.

Historically, arranged marriages are not unusual and even today are common in many parts of Asia and Africa. In cultures where arranged marriage is common, young people tend to be socialized to expect and look forward to such unions. But what happens in cultures that send very different messages? For example, immigrants from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh may desire that their children enter an arranged union, but their children are growing up in a culture where most of their schoolmates are obsessed with dating as a prelude to marriage and endlessly discuss the latest episodes of *Bachelor* and *Bachelorette*.

Studies of young people, in countries such as Canada and the United States, whose parents still cling to the tradition of arranging their children’s marriages document the challenges this represents. Many young people do still embrace the tradition of their parents. As one first-year female Princeton student of Asian Indian ancestry puts it, “In a lot of ways it’s easier. I don’t have pressure to look for a boyfriend” (Herschthal 2004). Young people like her will look to their parents and other relatives to finalize a mate or even accept a match with a partner who has been selected in the country of their parents. Systematic, nationwide studies are lacking, but available research points to a trend away from arranged marriages toward romantic marriages, even when the couples enter such unions over family objections.

Change has brought with it some variations as the expectation for formally arranged marriages has been modified to *assisted marriages* in which parents identify a limited number of possible mates based on what is referred to as “bio-data”—screening for caste, family background, and geography. Children get final veto power but rarely head out on their own when seeking a mate. Young men and women may date on their own but, when it comes to marrying, they limit themselves to a very narrow field of eligibles brought to them by their parents.

The combination of arranged and assisted marriages has meant that Asian Indian immigrants have the highest rates of ethnic endogamy of any major immigrant group in the United States—about 90 percent ingroup marriage.

Filipino Americans

Little has been written about the Filipinos, although they are the third-largest Asian American group in the United States, with 2.4 million people now living here. Social science literature considers them Asians for geographic reasons, but physically and culturally, they also reflect centuries of Spanish colonial rule and the more recent U.S. colonial and occupation governments.

Immigration Patterns

Immigration from the Philippines has been documented since the eighteenth century; it was relatively small but significant enough to create a “Manila Village” along the Louisiana coast around 1750. Increasing numbers of Filipino immigrants came as American nationals when, in 1899, the United States gained possession of the Philippine Islands at the conclusion of the Spanish–American War. In 1934, the islands gained commonwealth status. The Philippines gained their independence in 1948 and with it lost their unrestricted immigration rights. Despite the close ties that remained, immigration was sharply restricted to only 50–100 people annually until the 1965 Immigration Act lifted these quotas. Before the restrictions were removed, pineapple growers in Hawai‘i lobbied successfully to import Filipino workers to the islands.

Besides serving as colonial subjects of the United States, Filipinos played another role in this country. The U.S. military accepted Filipinos in selected positions. In particular, the Navy put Filipino citizens to work in kitchens. Filipino veterans of World War II believed that their U.S. citizenship would be expedited. This proved untrue; the problem was only partially resolved by a 1994 federal court ruling. However, it was not until a special presidential action in 2009 that Filipino American veterans received compensation to partially acknowledge their service in World War II (Padilla 2008a; Perry and Simon 2009).

Filipino immigration can be divided into four distinct periods:

1. The first generation, which immigrated in the 1920s, was mostly male and employed in agricultural labor.
2. A second group, which also arrived in the early twentieth century, immigrated to Hawai‘i to serve as contract workers on Hawai‘i’s sugar plantations.
3. The post–World War II arrivals included many war veterans and wives of U.S. soldiers.
4. The newest immigrants, who include many professionals (physicians, nurses, and others), arrived under the 1965 Immigration Act. More than 40 percent of Filipino Americans have immigrated since 1990 (Bureau of the Census 2007a; Min 2006; Posadas 1999).

As in other Asian groups, the people are diverse. Besides these stages of immigration, the Filipinos can also be defined by various states of immigration (different languages, regions of origin, and religions), distinctions that sharply separate people in their homeland as well. In the Philippines and among Filipino immigrants to the United States, eight distinct languages with an estimated 200 dialects are spoken. Yet assimilation is under way; a 1995 survey showed that 47 percent of younger Filipino Americans speak only English and do not speak Tagalog, the primary language of the Philippine people (Bonus 2000; Kang 1996; Pido 1986).

The Current Picture

The Filipino population increased dramatically when restrictions on immigration were eased in 1965. More than two-thirds of the new arrivals qualified for entry as professional and technical workers,
but like Koreans, they have often worked at jobs ranked below those they left in the Philippines. Surprisingly, U.S.-born Filipinos often have less formal schooling and lower job status than the newer arrivals. They come from poorer families that are unable to afford higher education, and they have been relegated to unskilled work, including migrant farm work. Their poor economic background means that they have little start-up capital for businesses. Therefore, unlike other Asian American groups, Filipinos have not developed small business bases such as retail or service outlets that capitalize on their ethnic culture.

A significant segment of the immigration from the Philippines, however, constitutes a more professional educated class in the area of health professionals. Although a positive human resource for the United States, it has long been a brain drain on the medical establishment of the Philippines. This is apparent when we consider areas in the United States that reflect Filipino settlement in the last 40 years. For example, in metropolitan Chicago, Filipino Americans have household incomes 30 percent higher than the general population and higher than that of Asian Indians. When the United States ceased giving preference to physicians from abroad, doctors in the Philippines began to enter the United States retrained as nurses, which dramatically illustrates the incredible income differences between the United States and the Philippines. They also send significant money back as remittances to help members of the extended family (DeParle 2007; Espiritu and Wolf 2001; Lau 2006; Zarembro 2004).

Despite their numbers, no significant single national Filipino social organization has formed, for several reasons. First, Filipinos’ strong loyalty to family (sa pamilya) and church, particularly Roman Catholicism, works against time-consuming efforts to create organizations that include a broad spectrum of the Filipino community. Second, their diversity makes forming ties here problematic. Divisions along regional, religious, and linguistic lines present in the Philippines persist in the United States. Third, although Filipinos have organized many groups, they tend to be club like or fraternal. They do not seek to represent the general Filipino population and, therefore, remain largely invisible to Anglos. Fourth, although Filipinos initially stayed close to events in their homeland, they show every sign of seeking involvement in broader non-Filipino organizations and avoiding group exclusiveness. Three-quarters of Filipino America are citizens, which is a larger proportion than most Asian American groups. The two political terms of Filipino American Benjamin Cayetano as governor of Hawai‘i from 1994 to 2002 are an example of such involvement in mainstream political organizations (Bonus 2000; Kang 1996; Lau 2006; Padilla 2008a; Posadas 1999).

Southeast Asian Americans

The people of Southeast Asia—Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians—were part of the former French Indochinese Union. Southeast Asian is an umbrella term used for convenience; the peoples of these areas are ethnically and linguistically diverse. Ethnic Laotians constitute only half of the Laotian people, for example; a significant number of Mon-Khmer, Yao, and Hmong form minorities. Numbering more than 2.1 million in 2008, Vietnamese Americans are the largest group, with more than 1.4 million members, or about 10.3 percent of the total Asian American population (see Figure 12.2).

The Refugees

The problem of U.S. involvement in Indochina did not end when all U.S. personnel were withdrawn from South Vietnam in 1975. The final tragedy was the reluctant welcome given to the refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos by Americans and people of other nations. One week after the evacuation of Vietnam in April 1975, a Gallup poll reported that 54 percent of Vietnamese were against giving sanctuary to the Asian refugees, with 36 percent in favor and 11 percent undecided. The primary objection to Vietnamese immigration was that it would further increase unemployment (Schaefer and Schaefer 1975).

Many Americans offered to house refugees in their homes, but others declared that the United States had too many Asians already and was in danger of losing its “national
character.” This attitude toward the Indochinese has been characteristic of the feeling that Harvard sociologist David Riesman called the *gook syndrome*. Goook is a derogatory term for an Asian, and the syndrome refers to the tendency to stereotype these people in the worst possible light. Riesman believed that the American news media created an unflattering image of the South Vietnamese and their government, leading the American people to believe they were not worth saving (Luce 1975).

The initial 135,000 Vietnamese refugees who fled in 1975 were joined by more than a million running from the later fighting and religious persecution that plagued Indochina. The United States accepted about half of the refugees, some of them the so-called boat people, primarily Vietnamese of ethnic Chinese background, who took to the ocean in overcrowded vessels, hoping that some ship would pick them up and offer sanctuary. Hundreds of thousands were placed in other nations or remain in overcrowded refugee camps administered by the United Nations.

**The Current Picture**

Like other immigrants, the refugees from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia face a difficult adjustment. Few expect to return to their homelands for visits, and fewer expect to return permanently. Therefore, many look to the United States as their permanent home and the home of their children. However, the adult immigrants still accept jobs well below their occupational positions in Southeast Asia; geographic mobility has been accompanied by downward social mobility. For example, only a small fraction of refugees employed as managers in Vietnam have been employed in similar positions in the United States.

Language is also a factor in adjustment by the refugees; a person trained as a manager cannot hold that position in the United States until he or she is fairly fluent in English. The available data indicate that refugees from Vietnam have increased their earnings rapidly, often by working long hours. Partly because Southeast Asians comprise significantly different subgroups, assimilation and acceptance are not likely to occur at the same rate for all.

Although most refugee children spoke no English upon their arrival here, they have done extremely well in school. Studies indicate that immigrant parents place great emphasis on education and are pleased by the prospect of their children going to college—something very rare in their homelands. The children do very well with this encouragement, which is not unlike that offered by Mexican immigrants to their children, as we discussed in Chapter 10. It remains to be seen whether this motivation will decline as members of the next young generation look more to their American peers as role models.

The picture for young Southeast Asians in the United States is not completely pleasant. Crime is present in almost all ethnic groups, but some observers fear that in this case it
has two very ugly aspects. Some of this crime may represent reprisals for the war: anti-
Communists and Communist sympathizers who continue their conflicts here. At the same
time, gangs are emerging as young people seek the support of close-knit groups even if
they engage in illegal and violent activities. Of course, this pattern is very similar to that
followed by all groups in the United States. Indeed, defiance of authority can be regarded
as a sign of assimilation. Another unpleasant but well-documented aspect of the current
picture is the series of violent episodes directed at Southeast Asians by Whites and others
expressing resentment over their employment or even their mere presence (Alvord 2000;

In 1995, the United States initiated normal diplomatic relations with Vietnam, which
is leading to more movement between the nations. Gradually, Vietnamese Americans are
returning to visit but generally not to take up permanent residence. Viet Kieu, Vietnamese
living abroad, are making the return—some 500,000 in 2010 compared to 270,000 in 1996.
Generational issues are also emerging as time passes. In Vietnamese communities from
California to Virginia, splits emerge over a powerful symbol—under what flag to unite a
nationality. Merchants, home residents, and college Vietnamese student organizations take
a stand by whether they decide to display the yellow-with-red-bars flag of the now-defunct
South Vietnam, sometimes called the “heritage flag,” or the red-with-yellow-star flag of the
current (and Communist) Vietnam (Tran 2008).

Meanwhile, for the more than 1.5 million Vietnamese Americans who remain, settle-
ment patterns here vary. Little Saigons can be found in major cities in the United States
long after the former South Vietnam capital of Saigon became Ho Chi Min City. Like
many other immigrant groups in the second generation, some Vietnamese have moved
into suburbs where residential patterns tend to be rather dispersed but one can still spot
mini-malls with Vietnamese restaurants and grocery stores—some even sporting a sloping
red-tiled roof. Other Vietnamese Americans remain in rural areas—for example, the Gulf
Coast fishermen who were rendered homeless by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Perhaps one
sign of how settled Vietnamese Americans have become is that some of the same orga-
nizations that helped the refugees learn English are now helping younger Vietnamese
Americans learn Vietnamese (Aguilar-SanJuan 2009; Pfeifer 2008b; Triev 2009).

Case Study: A Hmong Community

Wausau (population 38,000) is a community in rural Wisconsin that is best known, per-
haps, for the insurance company bearing its name. To sociologists, it is distinctive for its
sizable Hmong (pronounced “Mong”) population. The Hmong come from rural areas of
Laos and Vietnam, where they had been recruited to work for the CIA during the Vietnam
War. This association made life very difficult for them after the United States pulled out.
Hence, many immigrated, and the United States has maintained a relatively open policy
to their becoming permanent residents. Wausau finds itself with the greatest percentage
of Hmong of any city in Wisconsin. Hmong and a few other Southeast Asians account for
11 percent of the city’s population and 15 percent of its public school students (National
Center for Education Statistics 2011).

The Hmong, who numbered 186,000 as of 2000, immigrated to the United States from
Laos and Vietnam after the end of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam in April 1975. The
transition for the Hmong was difficult since they were typically farmers with little formal
education. Poverty levels have been high and home ownership has been uncommon.
Hmong have tended to form tight-knit groups organized around community leaders.
Nationwide divisions exist along generational lines as well as dialect spoken and whether
they are veterans of military service. Typically, cultural traditions surrounding marriage
and funerals remain strong Hmong Americans. Some are giving up Hmong traditional
worship of spirits for Christian faiths. Perhaps reflecting their entry into mainstream cul-
ture, Hmong culture and the challenges faced by the Hmong in the United States was
explored in Clint Eastwood’s 2008 fictional film Gran Torino (Pfeifer 2008a).

Like other refugees from South Asia at the time, the first Hmong came to Wausau at the
invitation of religious groups. Others followed as they found the surrounding agricultural
lands were places they could find work. This created a pipeline of chain immigration to

Viet Kieu
Vietnamese living abroad, such as in the United States
Chapter 12  Asian Americans: Growth and Diversity

In the 2008 motion picture *Gran Torino*, Clint Eastwood portrays a bitter retired autoworker that is suspicious of his Hmong neighbors in Detroit but comes to appreciate their willingness to help and their strong family values.

By 2011, neighborhood schools continue to play an important role in Wausau so that among elementary schools, the proportion of Hmong children ranged from less than 1 percent to 38 percent (School Digger 2011; Seibert 2002).

How events will unfold in Wausau is unclear. However, positive signs are identifiable in Wausau and other centers of Hmong life in the United States. Immigrants and their children are moving into nonagricultural occupations. Enrollment in citizenship classes is growing. Public healthcare programs directed at the Hmong community are widely publicized. The Wausau Area Hmong Mutual Association, funded by a federal grant and the local United Way, offers housing assistance. Although many of these immigrants struggle to make a go of it economically, large numbers have been able to move off public assistance. Language barriers and lack of formal schooling still are barriers encountered by older Hmong residents, but the younger generation is emerging to face some of the same identity and assimilation questions experienced by other Asian American groups. To help facilitate the adjustment, some Wausau residents are learning Hmong through a special program at a local college (Dally 2011; Menchaca 2008; Peckham 2002).

Korean Americans

The population of Korean Americans, with more than 1.3 million (see Figure 12.2), is now the fifth-largest Asian American group, yet Korean Americans often are overlooked in studies in favor of groups such as Chinese Americans and Japanese Americans, who have a longer historical tradition in the United States.

Historical Background

Today’s Korean American community is the result of three waves of immigration. The initial wave of a little more than 7,000 immigrants came to the United States between 1903 and 1910, when laborers migrated to Hawai’i. Under Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945), Korean migration was halted except for a few hundred “picture brides” allowed to join their prospective husbands.

The second wave took place during and after the Korean War, accounting for about 14,000 immigrants from 1951 through 1964. Most of these immigrants were war orphans...
and wives of American servicemen. Little research has been done on these first two periods of immigration.

The third wave was initiated by the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act, which made it much easier for Koreans to immigrate. In the four years before the passage of the act, Koreans accounted for only seven of every 1,000 immigrants. In the first four years after the act’s passage, 38 of every 1,000 immigrants to the United States were Korean. This third wave, which continues today, reflects the admission priorities set up in the 1965 immigration law. These immigrants have been well educated and have arrived in the United States with professional skills. More than 40 percent of Korean Americans have arrived in the United States since 1990 but by 2011 immigration had slowed to a trickle of fewer than 5,000 annually (Bureau of the Census 2007c; Dolnick 2011; Kim and Yoo 2008; Min 2006).

However, many of the most recent immigrants must at least initially settle for positions of lower responsibility than those they held in Korea and must pass through a period of economic adjustment and even disenchantment for several years. These problems documented the pain of adjustment: stress, loneliness, alcoholism, family strife, and mental disorders. Korean American immigrants who accompanied their parents to the United States when young now occupy a middle, marginal position between the cultures of Korea and the United States. They have also been called the ilchomose, or “1.5 generation.” Today, they are middle-aged, remain bilingual and bicultural, and tend to form the professional class in the Korean American community (Hurh 1998; Kim 2006).

The Sovereignty Movement

Today’s young Korean Americans face many of the cultural conflicts common to any initial generation born in a new country. The parents may speak the native tongue, but the signs on the road to opportunity are in the English language, and the road itself runs through U.S. culture. It is very difficult to maintain a sense of Korean culture in the United States; the host society is not particularly helpful. Although the United States fought a war there and U.S. troops remain in South Korea, Korean culture is very foreign to contemporary Americans. In the few studies of attitudes toward Koreans, White Americans respond with vague, negative attitudes or simply lump Korean Americans with other Asian groups. Studies by social scientists indicate that Korean Americans face many problems typical for immigrants, such as difficulties with language—79 percent of Korean Americans over age 5 do not speak English at home. In Los Angeles, home to the largest concentration, more than 100 churches have only Korean-language services, and local television stations feature several hours of Korean programs. The Korean immigrants’ high level of education should help them cope with the challenge. Although Korean Americans stress conventional Western schooling as a means to success, Korean schools have also been established in major cities. Typically, operated on Saturday afternoons, they offer classes in Korean history, customs, music, and language to help students maintain their cultural identity (Bureau of the Census 2007a; Hurh and Kim 1984; Johnson, Rios, Drewery, Ennis, and Kim 2010).

Korean American women commonly participate in the labor force, as do many other Asian American women. About 60 percent of U.S.-born Korean American women and half the women born abroad work in the labor force. These figures may not seem striking compared with the data for White women, but the cultural differences make the figures more significant. Korean women come here from a family system with established, well-defined marital roles: the woman is expected to serve as homemaker and mother only. Although these roles are carried over to the United States, because of their husbands’ struggles to establish themselves, women are pressed to help support their families financially as well.

Many Korean American men begin small service or retail businesses and gradually involve their wives in the business. Wages do not matter as the household mobilizes to make a profitable enterprise out of a marginal business. Under economic pressure, Korean American women must move away from traditional cultural roles. However, the move is only partial; studies show that despite the high rate of participation in the labor force by

ilchomose
the 1.5 generation of Korean Americans—those who immigrated into the United States as children
Korean immigrant wives, first-generation immigrant couples continue in sharply divided gender roles in other aspects of daily living.

Korean American businesses are seldom major operations; most are small. They do benefit from a special form of development capital (or cash) used to subsidize businesses called a kye (pronounced “kay”). Korean Americans pool their money through the kye, an association that grants members money on a rotating basis to allow them to gain access to additional capital. Kyes depend on trust and are not protected by laws or insurance, as bank loans are. Kyes work as follows: Say, for example, that 12 people agree to contribute $500 a year. Then, once a year, one of these individuals receives $6,000. Few records are kept, because the entire system is built on trust and friendship. Rotating credit associations are not unique to Korean Americans; West Indians and Ethiopians have used them in the United States, for example. Not all Korean business entrepreneurs use the kye, but it does represent a significant source of capital. Ironically, these so-called mom-and-pop entrepreneurs, as they encounter success, feel competitive pressure from national chains that come into their areas after Korean American businesses have created a consumer market (Reckard 2007; Watanabe 2007).

In the early 1990s, nationwide attention was given to the friction between Korean Americans and other subordinate groups, primarily African Americans but also Hispanics. In New York City, Los Angeles, and Chicago, Korean American merchants confronted African Americans who were allegedly robbing them. The African American neighborhood groups sometimes responded with hostility to what they perceived as the disrespect and arrogance of the Korean American entrepreneurs toward their Black customers. Such friction is not new; earlier generations of Jewish, Italian, and Arab merchants encountered similar hostility from what to outsiders seems an unlikely source—another oppressed subordinate group. The contemporary conflict was dramatized in Spike Lee’s 1989 movie Do the Right Thing, in which African Americans and Korean Americans clashed. The situation arose because Korean Americans are the latest immigrant group prepared to cater to the needs of the inner city, representing 70 percent of small grocery stores in New York City as of 2011, which has been abandoned by those who have moved up the economic ladder (Dolnick 2011; Hurh 1998; N. Kim 2008; New American Media 2007).

Among Korean Americans, the church is the most visible organization holding the group together. Half of the immigrants were affiliated with Christian churches before immigrating. One study of Koreans in Chicago and Los Angeles found that 70 percent were affiliated with Korean ethnic churches, mostly Presbyterian, with small numbers of Catholics and Methodists. Korean ethnic churches are the fastest-growing segment of the Presbyterian and Methodist faiths. The church performs an important function, apart from its religious one, in giving Korean Americans a sense of attachment and a practical way to meet other Korean Americans. The churches are much more than simply sites for religious services; they assume multiple secular roles for the Korean community. As the second generation seeks a church with which to affiliate as adults, they may find the ethnic church and its Korean-language services less attractive, but for now, the fellowship in which Korean Americans participate is both spiritual and ethnic (Kim and Pyle 2004; Kwon, Kem, and Warner 2001).

Hawai‘i and Its People

The entire state of Hawai‘i appears to be the complete embodiment of cultural diversity. Nevertheless, despite a dramatic blending of different races living together, prejudice, discrimination, and pressure to assimilate are very much present in Hawai‘i. As we will see, life on the island is much closer to that in the rest of the country than to the ideal of a pluralistic society. Hawai‘i’s population is unquestionably diverse, as shown in Figure 12.3.
To grasp contemporary social relationships, we must first understand the historical circumstances that brought races together on the islands: the various Asian peoples and the Haoles (pronounced “hah-oh-lehs”), the term often used to refer to Whites in Hawai’i (Ledward 2008).

**Historical Background**

Geographically remote, Hawai’i was initially populated by Polynesian people who had their first contact with Europeans in 1778, when English explorer Captain James Cook arrived. The Hawaiians (who killed Cook) tolerated the subsequent arrival of plantation operators and missionaries. Fortunately, the Hawaiian people were united under a monarchy and received respect from the European immigrants, a respect that developed into a spirit of goodwill. Slavery was never introduced, even during the colonial period, as it was in so many areas of the Western hemisphere. Nevertheless, the effect of the White arrival on the Hawaiians themselves was disastrous. Civil warfare and disease had reduced the number of full-blooded natives to fewer than 30,000 by 1900, and the number is probably well under 10,000 now. Meanwhile, large sugarcane plantations imported laborers from China, Portugal, Japan, and, in the early 1900s, the Philippines, Korea, and Puerto Rico.

In 1893, a revolution encouraged by foreign commercial interests overthrew the monarchy. During the revolution, the United States landed troops, and five years later, Hawai’i was annexed as a territory to the United States. The 1900 Organic Act guaranteed racial equality, but foreign rule dealt a devastating psychological blow to the proud Hawaiian people. American rule had mixed effects on relations between the races. Citizenship laws granted civil rights to all those born on the islands, not just the wealthy Haoles. However, the anti-Asian laws still applied, excluding the Chinese and Japanese from political participation.

The twentieth century witnessed Hawai’i’s transition from a plantation frontier to the fiftieth state and an integral part of the national economy. During that transition, Hawai’i became a strategic military outpost, although that role has had only a limited effect on race relations. Even the attack on Pearl Harbor had little influence on Japanese Americans in Hawai’i.

**The Current Picture**

Hawai’i has achieved some fame for its good race relations. Tourists, who are predominantly White, have come from the mainland and have seen and generally accepted the racial harmony. Admittedly, Waikiki Beach, where large numbers of tourists congregate, is atypical of the islands, but even there tourists cannot ignore the differences in intergroup relations. If they look closely, they will see that the low-wage workers in the resorts and tourist industry tend to be disproportionately of Asian descent (Adler and Adler 2004).

One clear indication of the multicultural nature of the islands is the degree of exogamy: marrying outside one’s own group. The outgroup marriage rate varies annually but seems to be stabilizing; about 45 percent of all marriages performed in the state involving residents are exogamous. The rate varies by group, from a low of 41 percent among Haoles to 62 percent among Chinese Americans (American Community Survey 2009:Table B03002; Hawaii Department of Health 2001:Table 80).

Prejudice and discrimination are not alien to Hawai’i. Attitudinal surveys show definite racial preferences and sensitivity to color differences. Housing surveys taken before the passage of civil rights legislation showed that many people were committed to nondiscrimination, but racial preferences were still present. Certain groups sometimes dominate residential neighborhoods, but there are no racial ghettos. The various racial groups are not distributed uniformly among the islands, but they are clustered rather than sharply segregated.
The multiracial character of the islands will not change quickly, but the identity of the Native Hawaiians has already been overwhelmed. Although they have a rich cultural heritage, they tend to be very poor and often view the U.S. occupation as the beginning of their cultural and economic downfall. For centuries they traditionally placed the earthly remains of their loved ones in isolated caves. However, as these “archaeological sites” were found by Haoles, the funeral remains made their way to the Bishop Museum, which is the national historical museum located in Honolulu. Now Native Hawaiians are using the Native American Graves and Protection Act to get the remains back and rebury them appropriately (LaDuke 2006).

“E Heluelu Kaqkou,” Nako’hlani Warrington tells her third graders (“Let’s read together”). She has no need to translate because she is teaching at the public immersion school where all instruction is in the Hawaiian language. Not too long ago it was assumed that Hawaiian would be spoken only by linguistic scholars, but efforts to revive it in general conversation have resulted in its use well beyond “aloha.” In 1983, only 1,500 people were considered native speakers; now native speakers number 68,000. This goes well beyond symbolic ethnicity. Language perpetuity is being combined with a solid grade school education, and a supportive doctoral program in the Hawaiian language was introduced in 2007 (Indian Country Today 2007; Kana’iaupuni 2008).

The sovereignty movement is the effort by the indigenous people of Hawai’i to secure a measure of self-government and restoration of their lands. Its roots and significance to the people are very similar to the sovereignty efforts by tribal people on the continental United States. The growing sovereignty movement has also sought restoration of the Native Hawaiian land that has been lost to Anglos over the last century, or at least compensation for it. Sometimes, the Native Hawaiians successfully form alliances with environmental groups that want to halt further commercial development on the islands. In 1996, a Native Hawaiian vote was held, seeking a response to the question, “Shall the Hawaiian people elect delegates to propose a Native Hawaiian government?” The results indicated that 73 percent voting were in favor of such a government structure. Since then, the state Office of Hawaiian Affairs has sought to create a registry of Hawaiians that is only about halfway to having all the estimated 200,000 people of significant Hawaiian descent on the islands come forward (Halualani 2002; Staton 2004).

Up to the present, Hawai’i’s congressional delegation has sought passage of the Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization Act, or the Akaka Bill, after U.S. Senator Daniel Akaka. It would give people of Hawaiian ancestry more say over resources, provide affordable housing, take steps to preserve culture, and create a means by which they could better express their grievances. As of 2011, the measure had passed the House but was never discussed on the floor of the Senate (Akaka 2011).

In 2008, a Native Hawaiian independence group seized the historic royal palace in Honolulu to protest the U.S.-backed overthrow of the Hawaiian government more than a century ago. Although the occupation barely lasted a day, the political discontentment felt by many Native Hawaiians persists (Magin 2008).

In an absolute sense, Hawai’i is not a racial paradise. Certain occupations and even social classes tend to be dominated by a single racial group. Hawai’i is not immune to intolerance, and it is expected that the people will not totally resist prejudice as the island’s isolation is reduced. However, newcomers to the islands do set aside some of their old stereotypes and prejudices. The future of race relations in Hawai’i is uncertain, but relative to the mainland and much of the world, Hawai’i’s race relations are characterized more by harmony than by discord.
Conclusion

Asian Americans are a rapidly growing group. Despite striking differences between them, they are often viewed as if they arrived all at once and from one culture. Also, they are often characterized as a successful or model minority. However, individual cases of success and some impressive group data suggest that the diverse group of peoples who make up the Asian American community are not uniformly successful. Indeed, despite high levels of formal schooling, Asian Americans earn far less than Whites with comparable education and continue to be victims of discriminatory employment practices.

The diversity within the Asian American community belies the similarity suggested by the panethnic label Asian American. Chinese and Japanese Americans share a history of several generations in the United States. Filipinos are veterans of a half century of direct U.S. colonization and a cooperative role with the military. In contrast, Vietnamese, Koreans, and Japanese are associated in a negative way with three wars. Korean Americans come from a nation that still has a major U.S. military presence and a persisting “cold war” mentality. Korean Americans and Chinese Americans have taken on middleman roles, whereas Filipinos, Asian Indians, and Japanese Americans tend to avoid the ethnic enclave pattern.

Who are the Asian Americans? This chapter has begun to answer that question by focusing on four of the larger groups: Asian Indians, Filipino Americans, Southeast Asian Americans, and Korean Americans. Hawai‘i is a useful model because its harmonious social relationships cross racial lines. Although it is not an interracial paradise, Hawai‘i does illustrate that, given proper historical and economic conditions, continuing conflict is not inevitable. Chinese and Japanese Americans, the subjects of Chapter 13, have experienced problems in American society despite striving to achieve economic and social equality with the dominant culture.

SPECTRUM OF INTERGROUP RELATIONS

Expulsion
Expulsion of ethnic Chinese from Vietnam in the 1970s

Segregation
Ethnic enclaves

Assimilation
Interrahem (Korean Americans)

Extermination
or genocide

Secession
or partitioning

Fusion
or amalgamation or melting pot

Pluralism
or multiculturalism

Expulsion of ethnic Chinese from Vietnam in the 1970s

Ethnic enclaves

Interrahem (Korean Americans)

Ethnic enclaves

Sovereignty movement among Hawaiians
Chapter 12  Asian Americans: Growth and Diversity

What Do You Think?

1. Often Asian Americans are labeled as a model minority, which overlooks the many problems they face and serves to minimize the challenges of succeeding despite prejudice and discrimination.
2. Asian Americans have been active politically through collective action and recently through seeking elected office. They continue to embrace both their unique identity as well as a broader pan-Asian identity.
3. Asian Indians are a diverse group culturally and, although most are Hindu, embrace a number of faiths.
4. Filipino Americans have a long historical connection to the United States, with today’s immigrants including both professionals as well as the descendants of those who have served in the U.S. military.
5. Southeast Asians’ presence in the United States has typically resulted from waves of refugees. They have created significant settlements throughout the United States and often have dispersed throughout the larger population.
6. The Hmong, originally from Laos and Vietnam, are a distinctive ethnic group that took up residence in the United States following their loyal support of the war effort in Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s.
7. Korean Americans have settled largely in urban areas, where many have become successful entrepreneurs.
8. Hawai’i and its Native Hawaiians present a different multiracial pattern from that of the mainland but not one without both prejudice and discrimination.

Key Terms

- **arranged marriage / 289**
  when one’s marital partner is chosen by others and the relationship is not based on any preexisting mutual attraction

- **blaming the victim / 283**
  portraying the problems of racial and ethnic minorities as their fault rather than recognizing society’s responsibilities

- **desi / 288**
  colloquial name for people who trace their ancestry to South Asia, especially India and Pakistan

- **gook syndrome / 292**
  David Riesman’s phrase describing Americans’ tendency to stereotype Asians and to regard them as all alike and undesirable

- **Haoles / 297**
  Native Hawaiians’ term for Caucasians

- **ichomose / 295**
  the 1.5 generation of Korean Americans—those who immigrated into the United States as children

- **kye / 296**
  rotating credit system used by Korean Americans to subsidize the start-up costs of businesses

- **model or ideal minority / 281**
  group that, despite past prejudice and discrimination, succeeds economically, socially, and educationally without resorting to political or violent confrontations with Whites

- **panethnicity / 285**
  the development of solidarity between ethnic subgroups, as reflected in the terms Hispanic and Asian American

- **racial profiling / 284**
  any arbitrary police-initiated action based on race, ethnicity, or national origin rather than a person’s behavior

- **sovereignty movement / 298**
  effort by the indigenous people of Hawai’i to secure a measure of self-government and restoration of their lands

- **Viet Kieu / 293**
  Vietnamese living abroad, such as in the United States

- **yellow peril / 283**
  a term denoting a generalized prejudice toward Asian people and their customs
Review Questions

1. How is the model-minority image a disservice to both Asian Americans and other subordinate racial and ethnic groups?
2. In what respects has the mass media image of Asian Americans been both undifferentiated and negative?
3. How has the tendency of many Korean Americans to help each other been an asset but also viewed with suspicion by those outside their community?
4. What critical events or legislative acts increased each Asian American group’s immigration into the United States?
5. To what degree do race relations in Hawai‘i offer both promise and a chilling dose of reality to the future of race and ethnicity on the mainland?

Critical Thinking

1. How is the model-minority image reinforced by images in the media?
2. Coming of age is difficult for anyone, given the ambiguities of adolescence in the United States. How is it doubly difficult for the children of immigrants? How do you think the immigrants themselves, such as those from Asia, view this process?
3. American Indians, Hispanics, and Asian Americans are all convenient terms to refer to diverse groups of people. Do you see these broad umbrella terms as being more appropriate for one group than for the others?